



**U.S. Department of Justice
U.S. Attorney's Office
Western District of Texas**

Johnny Sutton, U.S. Attorney

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**JURY FINDS THREE GUILTY FOR ROLES IN MARIJUANA TRAFFICKING OPERATION--
ONE ALSO GUILTY OF CONSPIRACY TO COMMIT MURDER
IN FURTHERANCE OF THE DRUG TRAFFICKING OPERATION**

United States Attorney Johnny Sutton announced that a federal jury in El Paso late yesterday afternoon found three individuals guilty for their roles in a marijuana trafficking organization based in Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua, Mexico. For the past two years, this organization was responsible for importing and distributing to the upper mid-west, east and northeastern portions of the United States in excess of 6,000 kilograms of marijuana.

Diana Marquez, wife of ringleader Mario Alonso Marquez-Ramos and a former Texas Alcohol Beverage Commission tax compliance officer, was convicted of one count each of money laundering and conspiracy to import and possess with intent to distribute over 1,000 pounds of marijuana. Jurors found that she provided organization members with intelligence about enforcement actions at the ports of entry and other related information as well as find stash houses, count drug proceeds and facilitate the money laundering of the drug proceeds with former El Paso real estate agent Horacio Fernandez. The jury convicted Fernandez of two counts of money laundering.

Hector Marquez-Ramos, brother of Mario Alonso Marquez-Ramos, was found guilty of one count of conspiracy to import and possess with intent to distribute over 1,000 pounds of marijuana, two substantive drug possession charges and one count of conspiracy to commit murder. Based upon the evidence presented to them, the jurors found that Hector Marquez, along with Ruben Acosta Vargas, Carlos Fabian Pando, Daniel Martinez, Mario Alonso Marquez-Ramos and Esaul Guerrero intentionally conspired with each other to kill Maria Elidia Liuzza by choking and beating her to death on February 15, 2005, in Juarez, Mexico. Courtroom testimony also revealed that Liuzza's death occurred in a house allegedly owned by the Marquez organization in Juarez and was committed to keep her son, a member of the organization, from cooperating with authorities. In February 2005, Federal authorities in Mexico executed search warrants at that residence as well as a second residence where they seized in excess of five tons of marijuana and a drug ledger.

"This case is a good example of the death and destruction that drug traffickers bring to the Texas-Mexico border. Thanks to the hard work of law enforcement and the prosecutors these drug traffickers are on their way to federal prison," stated United States Attorney Johnny Sutton.

On September 28, 2006, a hearing is scheduled before United States District Judge David Briones to determine if the government will be awarded a monetary judgement in this case of \$10 million--the proceeds derived from the organization's criminal activities. The government is also seeking the forfeiture of three El Paso residences belonging to the defendants which were used to carry out their drug distribution activities.

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“This verdict sends a resounding two-fold message to individuals who mistakenly think they can conspire to kill a United States citizen and get away with it if the crime occurs in a foreign country,” said Troy Henley, acting special agent in charge of the ICE El Paso Office of Investigations. “This case also exemplifies ICE’s commitment to dismantling major criminal organizations by taking their product as well as profit away from the traffickers.”

Diana Marquez and Hector Marquez each face between ten years and life in federal prison; Horacio Fernandez, up to 20 years in federal prison. All three are in federal custody pending sentencing in December.

Diego Villalobos, Lorenzo Villalobos, Ruben Acosta Vargas and Carlos Fabian Pando are currently in federal custody. Each pled guilty to various drug charges prior to jury selection. Mario Alonso Marquez-Ramos, Daniel Martinez, Esaul Guerrero and Christina Villalobos—all of whom face federal drug charges—are fugitives in this case.

“We have effectively dismantled a well-organized, well financed major drug trafficking operation with tentacles that stretched into violence, intimidation, and corruption. By working cooperatively with other law enforcement organizations like ICE and the prosecutors in the US Attorney’s office we are very proud of the outcome of this investigation and verdict,” stated Zoran Yankovich Drug Enforcement Administration Special Agent in Charge.

United States Attorney Johnny Sutton commended the investigative efforts of the United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement and the Drug Enforcement Administration. Assistant United States Attorneys Jose Luis Acosta and John Gibson are prosecuting this case on behalf of the government.

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